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BIENNIAL REPORT
1956-1958

PENNSYLVANIA
HISTORICAL & MUSEUM COMMISSION

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

June 1, 1956-May 31, 1958

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Museums, Historic Sites, and Properties

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Research, Publications, and Records

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

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June 1, 1956-May 31, 1958

FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMISSION

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is described in the Administrative Code as "the official agency of the Commonwealth for the conservation of Pennsylvania's historic heritage, and the preservation of public records, historic documents and objects of historic interest." It operates the State Museum, the Pennsylvania Farm Museum, and other museums and historical properties assigned to its administration by the General Assembly, many of which involve museum presentations. It conducts the historical marker program, selecting the sites, performing the necessary research, and erecting and maintaining the markers. It investigates and must approve all requests for disposal of State records, and it is responsible for collecting, preserving, and making available for use all those of a permanent archival nature. It carries on historical and archaeological research and publishes the results of such research, as well as numerous leaflets, pamphlets, and booklets for the information of the public and the school children of the Commonwealth. It co-operates with historical societies and other civic and patriotic organizations to advance the knowledge of the Commonwealth's history and archaeology. During

the two-year period ending on May 31, 1958, the Commission has made notable progress in all these fields and has laid a sound foundation for even further advances.

ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANIZATION

The professional staff of the Commission has continued intact since 1955, except for resignations for personal reasons, and a number of highly qualified additions have been made. The new Commission, appointed in January, 1956, with Frank W. Melvin as Chairman, began an administrative reorganization to produce more effective direction and more efficient operation of its program. Dr. Sylvester K. Stevens, former State Historian, became Executive Director. The post of Executive Assistant was established to strengthen further the administration of the Commission program in the areas of budget, finance, and purchasing. By the summer of 1956 a Bureau of Museums, Historic Sites, and Properties was set up with three divisions—the State Museum, the Pennsylvania Farm Museum at Landis Valley, and the Division of Historic Sites and Properties, which has charge of the maintenance, development, and interpretation of the various historic properties and the erection and maintenance of markers. Closer integration of museums and improvement of the physical plant and interpretation of the properties were thus assured. A Bureau of Research, Publications, and Records, consisting of the Division of Research and Publications and the Division of Public Records, was also created. Unification of previously overlapping functions was thereby attained. These Bureaus and the reorganized executive office made possible a better co-ordinated and more effective program than had heretofore been possible. Civil Service status was extended to the Commission's professional staff in 1957 by order of the Governor and Executive Board. It includes historians, archivists, and museum curators.

STATE MUSEUM

At the beginning of the period, the Museum was operating with a greatly restricted staff because of drastic and ill-advised personnel cuts made early in 1955. The staff has been rebuilt in part by an addition of an exhibits specialist, an artist, and a photographer; and in the process of rebuilding and reorganization, it has been improved greatly in terms of professional qualifications and specialized abilities. Many improvements have been made in the exhibits, and a reception center and sales booth has been established at the front entrance. The program of archaeological research and publication has been considerably extended by the staff. A good start has been made on cataloging and identifying many collections and works of art which previously had rested in neglect and covered with dust in museum areas not seen by the public. Inadequacies of staff and space and facility limitation imposed by the present inadequate and unsuitable building continue to limit development of a first-class State Museum. Despite these handicaps, improvements have been made which now make the Museum a stronger and better institution than at any time in its previous history.

THE PENNSYLVANIA FARM MUSEUM OF LANDIS VALLEY

Much progress has been made at the Pennsylvania Farm Museum with material aid from the State Museum staff in Harrisburg. The vast and previously almost entirely unorganized collections have been pulled out of hiding, cleaned, identified, and processed for use now or in the future. New buildings and additional land have been acquired to permit future expansion. Existing buildings have been repaired, painted, and made into usable exhibit areas. The arrangement, interpretation, and management of exhibits have been greatly improved, and an active campaign to promote visitation has been insti-

tuted. Visitation has almost doubled, and still further increases are anticipated. The formerly unused Landis House, now depicting farm life of the Victorian era, was opened in April, 1958. Plans have been drawn which envision the eventual creation of a museum village which will feature Pennsylvania's nineteenth-century farm life and its rural folk life and culture. The Farm Museum already is receiving widespread new publicity and enjoys a vastly increased attendance.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Since June, 1956, the number of the historic properties administered by the Commission has increased to eighteen with the addition of the 28th Division Memorial Shrine at Boalsburg, Graeme Park (built by Provincial Governor Keith) at Horsham, Montgomery County, and Hope Lodge at nearby Whitemarsh. Captain Phillips' Rangers Memorial in Bedford County has also been acquired. The legislative session of 1957 authorized Commission participation in the acquisition and restoration of the Searight Toll House on the old National Road near Uniontown and of the historic Bradford House in Washington, Pennsylvania.

Proper maintenance of the grounds and buildings at these properties is a major responsibility of the Commission. The new Commission faced a situation in which inadequate central supervision of the properties had produced serious problems of basic repair and maintenance. Property personnel previously had lacked adequate general supervision and training from Harrisburg. Conferences at the Commission central offices in Harrisburg have been instituted for the top property personnel to give them training and instruction and to enable them to become acquainted with each other and with their common problems as custodians. These conferences have proved highly beneficial. Through the new Bureau of Museums, Historic

Sites, and Properties, additional effective and intelligent field inspection, supervision, and cooperation were provided by a trained Commission staff. Attention was devoted to utilizing property personnel for more direct attention to on-the-spot maintenance and the undertaking of minor repairs to prevent later expensive major repairs resulting from neglect. Closer supervision and intelligent management by a competent directing staff have combined with training field personnel to produce material improvements in historic property maintenance under the present Commission.

Previous management of the Commission's historic properties largely overlooked the all-important modern concept of their interpretation to the visitor. Correcting this previous neglect involved improvement in the quality of guide service, creation of new exhibits wherever possible, attention to better reception facilities for visitors, and newer and more lively information folders. Experience has shown that at least 80 per cent of the visitation to a Commission property results from attracting the attention of the tourist while he is traveling in the State without any previous intention to visit a particular place, and often indeed with no knowledge of its existence. In order to meet this problem, the leaflets which tell the story of each property were radically revised and given a new and much more attractive format to arouse interest and a desire to see the place described. The entire leaflet series was organized into a mythical "Pennsylvania Trail of History" pattern and each folder was devoted to one stop on the Trail. A single folder, with a map designating locations, provides an introduction to the entire "Trail of History" and is designed to attract visitation. These folders are used not only at each single property to aid in interpretation of the particular place, but also at other sites in the entire group of Commission properties. The same literature is placed in hotels and motels

and otherwise so distributed as to attract the tourist. The new literature thus has served to implement property interpretation and as a device to attract travelers.

Before the end of the two-year period, steps had been taken to create better visitor facilities more fully equipped to provide information and service at major properties. At Ephrata Cloister a small log cabin near the main buildings was converted into a reception center and a specially designed scale model of the Cloister installed and equipped with a sound tape to provide a story for the visitors. A new museum and reception center was placed under contract at the Daniel Boone Homestead to be completed in the fall of 1958. Extensive improvements were made in the handling of visitors at the Pennsylvania Farm Museum. A new reception center was started at Drake Well Park in the form of a replica of a building of the early oil days. Old Economy was provided with a central reception and exhibit center to introduce visitors to the property.

In order to satisfy the desire of the present-day tourist for informational literature, color post cards, and suitable souvenir and gift items, entirely new types of material in this category were produced and a start made toward making them generally available. No service of this type had been available previous to 1956 at any Commission-administered property or museum. A series of new postcard albums in color was projected for future use. With the aid of privately organized, nonprofit corporate organizations known as Associates at Old Economy and Ephrata, entirely new sales and gift shop arrangements were placed in operation to serve the needs of the public with fine, distinctive souvenirs at these sites.

As a result of the application of these new concepts of historic property management, by the end of May, 1958, a majority of the Commission-administered properties were assuming an entirely new and improved aspect in keeping

with the type of presentation accepted as a model in various parts of the country. Patterns for continued progress were charted clearly for the future. Pennsylvania was assuming its proper place in the adequate presentation of its history to its many visitors.

The improvements in interpretation and literature were directly associated with a careful attention to improving the marking of the highways nearby and of routes leading directly to properties. A new and attractive roadside sign was designed and erected at key locations in co-operation with the Highway Department after study of the best spots. The basic purposes of these signs are first to attract the attention of passing tourists to a particular property and then to direct them how to get to it. In the fall of 1957 a new assignment of publicity and promotion duties was made to a newly appointed historian. A concentrated drive has been made since that time to secure additional mention of Commission properties on all tourist maps and literature whatever the source, and it has produced good results. A series of fifteen-minute radio programs widely distributed was also projected. Every possible avenue for advertising Commission historic sites was explored and utilized.

Another important step forward has been the encouragement of local organizations with an interest in particular properties and their improvement. At Ephrata and Old Economy these are chartered as Associates. An earlier organization, the Drake Well Memorial Park Foundation, has been utilized at that property. These bodies are organized as nonprofit educational corporations and are chartered by the courts of the county in which they are formed. The Commission in turn, as authorized by the Administrative Code, has entered into firm legal agreements with each Associates or Foundation covering in detail its authorized operations and the exercise of proper control by the Commission in relation thereto.

All agreements are approved by the Attorney General and the Governor, again according to legal provisions of the Administrative Code. In all instances in which gift shops or other sales operations are carried on by Associates or a Foundation a 5 per cent commission on the gross profit is paid into the Commission's Historical Preservation Fund. Associates and Foundation are obligated to purchase and place on sale certain Commission-sponsored publications, postal cards, and similar items which form a part of the Commission's own program of information. At Old Economy the Harmonie Associates undertook in 1956 the summer production of an historical dramatization of the Old Economy story in the garden of the Great House. It was continued successfully in 1957 and 1958.

The work of such organizations is of incalculable value to the Commission in bettering its presentation of these properties to visitors. They have made possible many activities and services of interest to tourists and visitors, which it would have been otherwise impossible to develop at State-managed historic sites.

HISTORICAL MARKERS

Erection of new markers has virtually ceased in the absence of special appropriations. An excellent system of maintenance for the more than twelve hundred now in existence keeps them attractive and in good condition. A carefully regulated program of erecting significant markers donated by private funds was begun on an experimental basis as a step toward intelligent further expansion of the state-wide historical marker program. A new guide to the markers was issued in 1957. The total number of historical markers is now 1,051 roadside and 212 city-type. Pennsylvania's program is recognized as the most comprehensive and adequate in the nation.

PUBLIC RECORDS

The Division of Public Records has been very active in the field of screening and disposing of public records in State offices. An efficient program of co-operation with the various State agencies and Management Methods representatives of the Office of Administration has been established, and work in this field has been much accelerated and improved. A large quantity of historically significant records has been added to the archives, and the routine work of accessioning new material, preparing finding aids, and assisting researchers has been advanced. The division has been severely hampered by inadequate facilities for storage and administration of records, inadequate working space, lack of modern equipment for lamination, and by a serious deficiency of trained personnel. Expansion and improvement are badly needed in order that this key agency in records disposal and historical research may broaden the scope of its work and perform at top efficiency.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

This division has been most active in the past two years. The major publication was the *Bibliography of Pennsylvania History*, a comprehensive and thoroughly indexed volume whose importance to students has been recognized not only by reviews but by an award of the American Association for State and Local History. Other publications during the period included a revised *Guide to the Historical Markers of Pennsylvania* and a number of *Historic Pennsylvania Leaflets*. *Thirty Thousand Miles with John Heckewelder*, the travel diaries of the famous Moravian missionary to the Indians of western Pennsylvania and Ohio, is about to be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press with Commission co-operation. In progress are a new and thoroughly revised book on the frontier forts prior to 1765; a book on Pennsylvania politics, 1833-1848; a

guide to the manuscript and microfilm collections of the Commission; and a pamphlet on the Indians of Pennsylvania. A number of other publications are in the planning stage. Considerable work has also been done in preparing and publishing folders for the properties, in furnishing research assistance on property and museum matters, and in supplying aid in publicizing the properties and other Commission activities. The division staff has been active in answering inquiries, aiding visiting researchers, locating pictorial materials, and co-operating with the Pennsylvania Historical Association and local historical societies. A number of important manuscript collections were added during the period.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Co-operation with other agencies has been on a very high level. Expert assistance was given the Department of Internal Affairs in processing a large body of land records and other historical materials; effective aid was furnished the Department of Commerce in its promotional work by supplying pictorial material and research information; efficient service was given to numerous departments in records disposals; and the Commission staff played a large role in the writing and editing of interagency informational leaflets and in the compiling of historical material for the *Pennsylvania Manual*.

In addition to its co-operation with other agencies of the Commonwealth, the Commission has taken an active part in a number of other co-operative projects of great significance. A Pennsylvania Heritage Committee was established in 1957. Consisting of prominent citizens from all parts of the State, it seeks to advance the interests of state and local history, and, on an informal basis, it advises the Commission and supports its work. In co-operation with the Pennsylvania State University, the Commission

has sponsored the week-long summer Institute on Pennsylvania Life and Culture in 1957 and 1958. This Institute has great possibilities in developing a more widespread and better directed interest in the history of the Commonwealth in all its phases.

THE WILLIAM PENN MEMORIAL BUILDING

One of the most important developments in the past three years has been the revived project for the construction of the William Penn Memorial Building to house the State Museum and the historical and archival activities of the Commission. This building was authorized by an act of the General Assembly in 1945 but never activated. Late in 1957 the General State Authority, under Commission urging, made funds available for architectural planning. The final plans and specifications are now in preparation, and it is expected that the funds for erecting the building will be provided in the next biennium.* Its completion will make possible a really adequate State Museum, provide adequate and proper storage for the accumulation of valuable State records, and provide much-needed space for the expanding research and administrative staffs of the Commission.

FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS

The greater portion of the funds for carrying on the diverse activities of the Commission comes from direct appropriations by the General Assembly, either as part of the general appropriation bills or as special appropriations for particular properties or activities. Admission fees collected at the historical properties and the proceeds from the sale of Commission publications go into a Historical Preservation Fund, which is used for improvements at the properties and for research and publications. In this way, part of

* The General Assembly of 1959 did enact legislation providing funds for the erection of the William Penn Memorial Building.

the cost of the Commission's historical activities is borne by those particularly interested rather than by the general taxpayer.

During the period from June 1, 1956, to May 31, 1958, the total expenditures of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission amounted to \$1,057,809.00. Of this total, \$446,034 was expended in the Harrisburg office for the State Museum, management of properties, care of the public records, research and publications, and administrative purposes; \$409,874 was expended for care and maintenance of the historical properties; \$155,741 was spent for capital improvements (restoration and development) at the properties; and \$46,160 was spent from the Historical Preservation Fund for publications and for special projects at the properties.

With the funds granted by the General Assembly, supplemented by the Historical Preservation Fund, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has made substantial progress in serving the people as the Commonwealth's official historical agency.



